

March 4, 2013

Ms. Davita Vance-Cooks
Acting Public Printer of the United States
United States Government Printing Office
723 North Capitol Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20401-0001

Dear Ms. Vance-Cooks:

We support the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) conclusion that "free access to government information is both an important tenet of a democracy and a critical responsibility." We do not believe that NAPA's recommendation # 4, which calls for the Government Printing Office (GPO) to consider charging fees for end users of the Federal Digital System (FDsys), will foster democracy or the right of all in America to access the information produced with their tax dollars.

The NAPA report "Rebooting the Government Printing Office: Keeping America Informed in the Digital Age" recognizes the importance of the Federal Depository Library Program in providing access to traditional and electronic formats. But its suggestion that free access be limited to that provided through the depository libraries does not recognize that access to FDsys makes it possible for all libraries to provide access.

The report's assertion that the attempt to collect fees for access to GPO Access (Now FDsys) failed because the "technologies of online payments" were inadequate does not recognize that the Public Printer and the Joint Committee on Printing agreed that providing free access to everyone was the best way to promote democracy and fulfill the mandate of Congress to keep the public informed about its government. Charging for information and providing the same information for free is not a practical and workable business model.

Charging non-depository library users would impede technical innovation and the re-use and re-purposing of government information. It would contradict the policy of providing bulk government information for re-use. It would repudiate open government initiatives such as doc.house.gov, federalregister.gov, data.gov, and consumer.data.gov.

We do support NAPA's recommendation that the government should implement a government-wide strategy for managing the life cycle of digital government information; that GPO should offer to government agencies cost-recovery services for the life cycle management of information, including preservation; and that GPO should develop a strategic plan for the Federal Depository Library Program that will give libraries the flexibility and tools they need to provide free permanent public access to government information in the digital age (P. 3).

GPO should return to the model of sharing responsibility for preservation and access with Federal Depository Libraries. This would allow GPO to charge government agencies for information and content management services without having to impose fees on the public for use of that information. It would also release GPO from the burden of being solely responsible for the preservation of and access to government information. We urge that the 200 year old partnership between GPO and the libraries continue into the digital future.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

CASSANDRA (Concerned Government Information Professionals)

Bernadine Abbott Hoduski, Professional Staff Member, Retired, U. S. Congress, Joint Committee on Printing, 4942 Walnut 1 South, K. C. MO 64112 ber@montana.com

Francis Buckley, Librarian Retired and Superintendent of Documents Emeritus
POB 24388, Ft Lauderdale, Florida 33307 francisjbuckley@aol.com

Martha Childers, Government Documents Librarian, retired, Johnson County Library, KS
Kansas City, MO Marthachilders@hotmail.com

Joan Goddard, Public Librarian, Retired
1171 West Latimer Ave., Campbell, CA 95008 joan@rujo.org

Patricia Hassan, Librarian, Retired, Johnson County Library (KS)
23226 W. 71 Ter., Shawnee Mission, KS 66227 phassan@kc.rr.com

Anne Heanue, ALA Washington Office, Retired
610 Pullman Place, Alexandria, VA 22305 aheanue@comcast.net

Murray Louis Howder, Librarian Retired
3711 Livingston St. N. W., Washington, D. C. 20015-1737

Jeanne Isacco, Librarian, Retired
125 56th Ave South, St Petersburg, FL 33705 jisacco@earthlink.net

James A. Jacobs, Librarian Emeritus, University of California, San Diego
7050 Condon Drive, San Diego, CA 92122 jajacobs@ucsd.edu

James R. Jacobs, Former Chair of Depository Library Council
Government Information Librarian, Stanford University
544 Guerrero St #2, San Francisco, CA 94110 jrjacobs@stanford.edu

Melody Specht Kelly, Associate Dean Emerita, University of North Texas
2109 Kayewood, Denton, TX 76209 Melody.Kelly@unt.edu

Linda M. Kennedy, Librarian Emerita, University of California, Davis
POB 294, The Sea Ranch, CA 95497 lmkenney@ucdavis.edu

Barbara Kile, Librarian, Retired, Rice University Library
5223 Jason Street, Houston TX 77096-1320 kilebar@rice.edu

Charles R. Leacy, Associate Professor Emeritus, Georgia Institute of Technology
54-8 Jacqueline Road, Waltham, MA 02452 Redbat22002@yahoo.com

Candace Morgan, Librarian, Retired
707 SW Dolph St, Portland, OR 97219 cd_df_morgan@msn.com

Judy Myers, Professor Emerita, University of Houston Library
2511 County Rd 62, Rosharon, TX 77583 judy_Myers@hotmail.com

Mary Redmond, Librarian, New York State Library, Retired
26 Clarendon Road, Albany, New York 12203 jeremy2@doglover.com

Patricia Reeling, Professor Emerita, School of Communications and Information, Rutgers
23118 Shannondell Drive, Audubon, PA 19403 reeling@scils.rutgers.edu

Suzanne Sears, Former Chair of Depository Library Council 2010-2011
Assistant Dean for Public Services, University of North Texas suzanne.Sears@unt.edu

Barbara Smith, Professor Emerita, Skidmore College Library
RD3 Box 217, 33 Loughberry Rd, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Maryellen Trautman, Documents Librarian, United States National Archives, Retired
9207 Chanute Drive, Bethesda, MD 20814 lemketrautman@rcn.com

Justine P. Veatch, Library Consultant
714 Harrison Drive, Evans, GA 30809 jamesveatchchjr07@comcast.net

Lynn Walshak, Professor Emerita, Georgia Southern University Library
14207 Misty Meadow, Houston, TX 77079 lwalshak@sbcglobal.net

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U. S. Congress Joint Committee on Printing

U. S. Congress. Senate Rules Committee

U. S. Congress Committee On House Administration

U. S. Congress, House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch

U. S. Congress Senate Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch